THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

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A PERSON may be very clever, brilliant, even a genius along some particular line ; but there is a subtle something in an artist which is above all these. Everywhere in the world there are numbers of outstanding people. But what makes them outstanding ? Among the western ballet-dancers there are many people in a chorus who can do greater gymnastic stunts than the chief dancer ; but the person who can do the stunts remains in the chorus. Why ? Because that person lacks in soul, in the spirit which makes an artist. To be really a creative artist and to express the Divine Genius, nobody can teach anyone. It must come from within as something we cannot help expressing.

It has become fashionable to use certain phrases about the artistic temperament ; and some people who are not real artists try to

appear temperamental in order to create the impression that they are artists. A real artist does not bother about what he really is. He only thinks of what he has to give, what he has within himself which he must express; and this emotional experience is the most important.

Some people think that art is merely a matter of emotion and has very little to do with the mind. That is a mistake ; because though art is an emotional experience, the emotion has to be made clear to the hearer and observer ; the emotion has to be expressed in terms of intelligence.

So, keen intelligence, deep powers of thought, quick vision, swiftness to grasp ideas and to change them, all these are very necessary to the artist, because they are the instruments through which the emotion itself is expressed. To be a real creative artist we have to remember that both emotion and intelligence are necessary.

In modern times the mind is most dominant, and artists try to be very clever. Some succeed, some do not. But it is not enough to be clever. Merely clever art is

very hard, very painful to look at or to listen to, because we have to listen and look with our minds. When we see a very clever picture, we begin to think about it and say to ourselves, " I suppose it is beautiful, for according to my mental analysis everything is right." The moment we start thinking in this manner, everything is wrong, because we should never be able to analyse a piece of art. Even though we may be able to analyse it up to a point, we shall still have to say, " I do not know what it is." If there is something that eludes our analysis, something beyond the mind's critical vision, then that art has something within it.

That is where the difference comes in between genius and brilliance. The genius can afford to make mistakes from the technical standpoint. The brilliant person cannot afford to make mistakes, because he has only his brilliance, only his intellect. So if he makes a few mistakes, other people, perhaps even cleverer than the technician, will say, " What! This is wrong, the proportion of that is not quite true. According to this theory, or that book, he is quite wrong."

Now, books are very important, and I myself use several books for a basis of explanation in some of my classes. Books are important, because we want to know the steps on which to climb. We do not know where to go if we have no steps, and the stepping-stones are books, records of intellectual ideas and analyses, technique and so on.

But if we go beyond and have conquered our art, we can throw away all the lesser things. We do not need feet—we have wings. Technique, books, theory are our feet. Having learned to walk and then to fly, we can say, "I will throw all this away. I have the background that I need."

That is really the essential point about expressing oneself through an art. That is why it so often happens when people listen to music or see dancing, everything seems technically right, but they feel that it is wrong, and cannot tell just what is wrong. What is really wrong is that the performer is missing the very essence of life, he is not expressing a certain "IT" which is genius in art.

In India, really creative art does not exist to any great extent in modern times. Very much of what we are trying to express is not an experience but an idea from without. A very important essential to the expression of art is that while we may listen to everybody, and may watch and study everything, we must know for ourselves. The artist does not say, "I know dancing, I know music," but "I am dancing, I am music."

The artist says, "It is to my experience that I owe my art." And that experience is irrespective of audiences, irrespective of what other people may think. Though artists are usually very sensitive, and care what other people think of them, and want other people's appreciation, within they really do not care. Though they crave response, they also know what they want to give, and no matter how much other people may try to dissuade them, they do not heed them, because they know. It is very necessary to have that strength of mind and emotion. It is very necessary to feel entirely independent of the world, though we may feel very much part of it.

In the past in India, if we study the dance that existed then, the music, the handicraft, the pottery, the weaving, the furniture, such simple articles as mats we find there was much beauty in them. India did not have art that was meant for mere display. That to me is a fundamental attitude. We do not dance to show off. We dance because it is part of our life, because we want to give, to spread a certain life. Not that we necessarily analyse our attitude before we dance ; we just feel that art is part of life, and is not outside us.

In old India, art was part of the scheme of everyday life ; " Was," you note I said, because it is not so now, for we have unfortunately been told that art must be displayed, it is something to show. Very rarely in old Indian homes did they have drawing-rooms and bedrooms furnished in a particular way with special ornaments such as flower-vases. They saw the flowers in the garden. Why did they want to see a specially-shaped vase ? There were many beautifully shaped vessels in their kitchens. What they used every day was so beautiful, there was no

necessity to display one special object of beauty. Every time you eat your food you see and use beautiful vessels. Why do you want to see vases on the shelves? Everything in life in such an environment becomes beautiful and picturesque. You do not want special things to express beauty? That is the genius we want to restore in India. In our old Indian homes they used lamps that were not merely for light. They were lights in themselves, even when they were not lit, because of the beautiful designs in the brass-work. The people had wonderful ideas, they were full of originality. Barely did one see two lamps alike.

Even the simple earthenware pots were marvellous. It did not matter if one were rich or poor. If one were rich, then there were silver vessels with marvellous shapes. In between there were beautiful brass vessels. If one were poor, then there were earthenware vessels, just as beautiful as the brass or the silver because of their wonderful shapes.

I have seen in western drawing rooms some of our kitchen utensils. At first I laughed and said, " That is something my grandmother

used in her kitchen." Later on I began to realise why. Even some Indians bring vessels from the kitchen and put them on the table with flowers. That is the art we in India must develop again; that everything we use is so beautiful we hardly need to have specially created things to be called beautiful. Naturally we must have pictures, but also let us have beautiful wood-work, lovely doors and windows, the whole architecture of the house embodying beauty.

We have to find our own genius. That is where the real creative spirit has to be born in India, and it can be born only when we not merely learn to see what is Indian, but to experience the spirit of India.

Do not think I am so narrow mindedly patriotic that I think we can never see and have anything beautiful from outside India. Some may think I do not want anything western. It is difficult geographically to separate one country from another. Perhaps what we ourselves may call Indian has blended in it influences from outside. Perhaps what we call European is also helped by other countries. They have borrowed the art of

Egypt, of Chaldea, of Greece, of China, and gradually through their own genius have changed it to suit themselves. We can also change and adapt such art to suit our needs. Let us see what there is, but do not let us lose what we have because we have no eyes to see.

We must train ourselves to have eyes to see. Here is a very common example. We know that South India is famous for its bronzes; not those made in modern times, but those from the old temples which are especially beautiful. All the postures in the modern bronze-work may be the same as in the old, but the old bronze possesses something that the modern statues do not have. Sometimes it happens that some of these old bronzes lie for years in a brass-shop, neglected, unwanted. Someone with a perception of the beautiful comes into the shop and says, "That is the very statue I want—that is really beautiful." The shoopkeeper may reply, "Oh that is very old, nobody likes it, so you can have it very cheap." The buyer is extremely thrilled and the poor shopkeeper does not know the worth of what he has had for so long. Many people

have made collections through the ignorance of just such shopkeepers. Then perhaps this piece of bronze is put into a museum and receives a notice in the newspapers saying that a wonderful statue has been found. Then the people living next door to the brass shop say, " Why, that is the particular statue that the man tried to sell me for one rupee, and now it is worth thousands of rupees," and it becomes beautiful in the eyes of people who had not appreciated it before, because the newspaper has said so. Any statement in the press comes with great authority.

We in India have great treasures, but we have not learned to discover them. The greatest treasures, of course, are the simplest, and because they are so simple we are unable to find them. This is because we ourselves are not simple.

Art is not merely analysis. Our lives must become so filled with beauty, with beautiful ideas and beautiful thoughts and feelings, that we ourselves must go into deep meditation, in order to delve deeper and deeper, and see the difference between the real and the unreal. To see the difference between the real

and the unreal absolutely is almost an impossible task, and we can do it only comparatively; but that is the highest kind of appreciation there is, to see something and know that there is God, so to speak, in that form.

This applies to humanity too. We see the real in some very outstanding person; but what about someone who may look ordinary, even ugly? Most people will pass that person by. Only the very great one will say, "That person, though he may look ordinary, looks extraordinary to my eyes." The great person usually discovers greatness in somebody else and then brings that greatness to the foreground. If we read the history of many of the greatest people in the world, we realize they might have been quite insignificant but for the help they have received from one or two great people. It is very true in South India. I have known many cases where artists have been completely neglected, and not even noticed until some person declared that artist great. Then the simple person cannot understand the new position he has been awarded. He remains the same, he has not changed, but other people have changed towards him.

Another important element in art is the religious spirit. Very much of the genius that was expressed in the arts not only of India but of all countries, of all civilizations, was influenced by religion. I am not saying that we should become orthodoxly religious. Your religion may not be a church, it may not be a particular temple; but you must have a religion in its right sense. In fact you can be an atheist, and be religious in your atheism. Your religion may be your art, but that extreme consecration to your ideal, that one-pointed devotion to that ideal and to power of will to struggle and work until you really achieve you ideal, that purity of purpose and emotion, I call religion.

When you have such a tremendous aspiration that you go beyond your own bodies into the great heights of emotion, that you go into deep thoughts, that you can get into those abstract realms that ordinarily are impossible to enter, if you can have such high aspiration, the real creative spirit will automatically come to you.

Do not think that you have to attend classes for the creative spirit. It is true that many

people give such classes, but they become monotonous, and much of the so-called "creative" music is a copy of somebody else's creation.

There is another important aspect of art. When you have the real emotion, full of aspiration and fire, you have so many new ideas that you are yourself surprised. Imagine the music that has been created out of the seven tones. We have hundreds of songs from North India, from South India, all-containing these some tones. Could you by yourself create all these different varieties? See what genius has done. From where did that genius come? It came because of the bigness of art, it came because of deep emotions, and that deep emotional power is absolutely essential for the creative spirit.

There is another interesting thing about the creative spirit. The creative spirit does not mean always new ideas, nor that everything you do must be done differently. The person who has the creative genius can do the same thing a hundred times, and yet it must seem different, because to him each time it is new. If you have devotion to the ideal and this

religious spirit, you will find each day is a new day; each time you sing the same song it is a new song; each time you dance it is a new dance. If you experience that freshness every day, you are bound to make other people feel you are inspired, and the other person will never be bored. In fact it is almost a sign, if your audiences are not bored, that you are not bored. If the artist is bored, in other words if the art is tired of the artist and is trying to get away from him, then the audience also gets tired of the art, for it is no longer creative art.

That is where the master hand is different from the ordinary one. I have seen dancers who were very great in the world's eye, who turned and jumped and performed extraordinary gyrations with the body, and everybody said, "How splendid!" But to me it was just like a circus. What is the difference between the acrobat and the good dancer? The acrobat can jump much higher, turn a greater number of times. The dancer is not able to do one third of the tricks of the acrobat. The real dancer can make just a few gestures—but one look of the eye, one turn of the head, every

little movement is so full of meaning, so full of expression, that you notice it. A tiny finger lifted with meaning is far more thrilling than all the turns and gyrations and tricks of the circus performer.

Do not think, therefore, you can go on in a flabby way doing always the same thing. We must have control of the body. That is where we need technique in order to express what is in us. If we do not learn to control the body, and we take a leap, for example, naturally we will do something very ugly. In order to do whatever we are doing beautifully we need control of the body. It is the same thing with the voice, or with the hand that paints a picture.

But this is not in itself enough. In fact, if you become an expert, you are content to do simple things. Other people may wonder why this expert is not doing all the marvellous things, but the expert does not care; he is beyond opinions, being an expert. All that is the result of experiencing the art.

Up to a certain point everybody responds to beauty. Because a person is not interested in dancing or music, it does not mean he is

not interested in art, that he is not an artist. If you, for example, are interested in wearing beautiful sarees, to that extent you are an artist. Look at the person in the street who buys a dreadful calender with bright colours. He says, " This is really beautiful." He is an artist. Perhaps he does not know from our point of view the difference between the good and the bad, but he automatically loves what to him is beautiful, though he does not know how to choose it. This is true of everybody. If you throw a picture into the waste basket you will find your servant asking, " May I take this home, it is so nice ? I will give it to the children ". You may wish you had given them something beautiful, but if you had, they would not perhaps have considered it beautiful. The love of beauty is existent in everyone, and that love of beauty has to be gradually trained.

Who is to train us ? How are we to know if the person who is training us is an artist ? That is a point about art that we cannot know, we have to feel. Somehow something in us says, " That person attracts me. I feel that in that person is the real

thing." In this way we recognize the true teacher.

We must not be attracted by the merely clever. In the western countries they are very clever in their knowledge of art; but one does not see in the classical arts enough real spirituality. Art must be spiritual; and it is bound to be if we have the spirit to which I have been referring. If it comes purely from the mind, what will happen is that we will create extremely beautiful and wonderfully artistic guns and bombs. We do not want the mind to be so artistic that our art shows only the mind. In the West they understand the psychology of the ordinary person, and put temptations in the way of everyone by their very attractive shop windows. It is all very clever. But in India we have to compel the salesman to produce what he does not want to sell; but western commercial art has developed to such a very fine point that people buy what they do not want to buy, all as the result of a very clever psychology.

In olden days Indian art was unconscious, and nowadays it is trying to become conscious; and that is why we are wobbling so

much on the path. We do not know how to create consciously the beautiful things we once created unconsciously. The simple potter who has no education, no degrees, is not even a Montessori diplomé, goes on making beautiful pots. The weaver goes on weaving his cloth beautifully. Of course if you ask him, " Is orange and green a very nice combination of colours ? Please make me something modern and smart," he will not know how to answer, and he will make something modern and smart and ugly. But if you ask him to make something in his old ordinary way, he will make something beautiful, and will do it unconsciously.

The peasants have a far better sense of colour and beauty than the ordinary person. Take the village embroideries in Kathiawar and in Sind, they are exquisitely beautiful, with wonderful colours. Compare them with those in fashionable places, where much trouble is taken with their table-cloths and drawn work, and you will see that the most beautiful was made by those who had no degrees.

It is necessary to have the simplicity of mind that the ordinary coolie has. If plus

our education we can keep that simplicity, we are safe. We are so educated that we become gradually complicated and very important to ourselves. We are all of us in the same danger, and therefore we lose that simplicity.

That is where the genius of India must be expressed—that spiritual background which is simplicity, that high aspiration, that deep love of an ideal, a goal, and an unconscious but intelligent impulse to express it, these are the qualities we want, and these we must express in our everyday lives.

I am afraid we do not live true to such an ideal, yet only when we do are we being really Indian artists. Take some of our dancers who dance the great stories from our religious books, such as the story of Sri Krishna and Radha. If the person who dances does not believe in Sri Krishna and Radha, and goes off the stage, and in his motor-car smokes and says, "I am not a Hindu," how can he really do it? I do not think it possible, unless we have experienced it. In everyday life we must feel the spirit of Krishna, the spirit of Radha, so that all that greatness may inspire us. If the feeling is there, we dance, or

sing, because singing, painting, making beautiful sculpture, all these things are expressions of the highest aspiration. If we have had the real experience, then our art is living, it is creative it is new all the time, it is truth.

One example of such art in the West is the Parthenon of Greece. It is now in ruins, though much of it has been reconstructed. This was to me, when I saw it, one of the most inspiring pieces of art. What does it matter if it is in ruins; it is quite beautiful, quite complete enough. Why is it so inspiring these thousands of years after it was created? Because the master who did it was in the highest sense of the term living when he created it; he was full of a freshness that lives to-day. You will find that same spirit in our marvellous temple architecture in India. You should go to these temples, you should go to the museum and see the very beautiful bronzes. But do not merely look on the fingers, the hand, the head. Become thrilled by it, so that it will stir up in you the capacity to do equally great things, your own new and great things, or perhaps new things in an old way or old things in a new way. But let us

be Indian, because we are born Indian, and that is the only thing we can really express. We may be great in other things but we must be great in ourselves.

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